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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this paper were to briefly define content analysis, to report the findings of a survey of dissertations using content analysis methodology in the field of youth media, to place these studies into a typological pattern, and to suggest needed content analysis research in media for youth. Eighty-nine studies selected from a total of 488 dissertations were classified as using content analysis methodology according to O. R. Holsti's definition. The study concludes that content analysis offers much to those interested in learning more about the characteristics of media intended for children and adolescents. (RB)

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by

W. Bernard Lukenbill

May, 1974

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CONTENT ANALYSIS IN THE STUDY OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION FOR YOUTH:* A TYPOLOGY OF DISSERTATION RESEARCH

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W. Bernard Lukenbill

Content analysis as a research methodology has been available to students of communications for decades; yet, within the various disciplines associated with communication and media, it has received little attention in formal instruction as a technique of inquiry.[1] This generalization can undoubtedly be extended to librarianship and to the study of media for youth where it lies little understood and often suspect. Such suspicion comes largely from a record of poor content analysis research based on inadequate theoretical concepts and faulty research designs.

It is the purpose of this paper to briefly define content analysis; to report the findings of a survey of dissertations using content analysis methodology in the field of youth media and to place these studies into a typological pattern; and to suggest needed content analysis research in media for youth.

The Evaluation of a Definition

In 1952, B.R. Berelson defined content analysis - rather rigidly in comparison with today's standards - as a research technique which insures objective, systematic and quantitative description of the contents of communications.[2] Writing in 1971, Ole R. Holsti noted the emergence of a less rigid and exacting trend in defining content analysis and pointed out the generally agreed upon components of content analysis definition

* In this paper, the term "youth" refers to both children and adolescents.

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as objectivity, system, and generality. Objectivity, he stated, is guaranteed through explicitly stated and derived rules which enable two or more individuals to obtain the same results from a review of the same documents. System insures the inclusion or exclusion of data in accordance with previously constructed criteria which are consistently applied throughout the analysis process and protects against the gathering of data only supportive of the researcher's hypothesis. Holsti's reference to generality implies that content analysis must be more than descriptive and provincial in nature, that the findings of a study must be theoretically relevant to other data and to other communication phenomena.[3] Recognizing the trend away from a rigid, quantitative definition of content analysis, the writer employs Holsti's assertion that:

> Content analysis is any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages.[4]

Content Analysis Studies

Using H.D. Laswell's famous formulation: "Who does what to whom with what effect,"[5] for analyzing communications, Holsti also developed a scheme for describing the types of content analysis studies traditionally conducted in various areas of communication.[6] Because of its catholicity, this same scheme was used in this study to classify dissertations using content analysis to study media for youth.

In an effort to classify the types of dissertation studies generally conducted in the field of youth media using content analysis as a methodology, a procedure was developed whereby 483 dissertations accepted by American and Canadian universities between 1930 and 1973 were identified.

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The sources for these dissertations were Lukenbill's A Working Bibliography of American Dissertations in Children's and Adolescents' Literature, 1930-1971, supplemented by the later volumes of Dissertation Abstracts International.[7]

Of the 488 dissertations identified, abstracts were located for 440. From this latter number, 89 studies were classified as content analyses according to Holsti's definition.[8] The second step in this inquiry was to then categorize these 89 studies according to the Holsti typology of content analysis. Table 1 presents a classification of all 89 of these dissertations according to the Holsti typology based on his designations of research purposes, communication questions, and research problems.

For the remaining discussion, Holsti's typological scheme is restated in the form of questions and is used to further exemplify content analysis dissertation studies relating to youth media.[10]

Question 1. What characterizes the content of youth media? Of the 89 studies identified as appropriate content analysis studies, 23 were concerned with describing characteristics of communications, including trends within the media and investigations which audited communication content against priori standards.

An almost classic example of a trend study is Knodel (1972) who investigated trends in selected junior novels written between 1951 and 1970 and which had received critical recognition during the same period.[11] McReynolds (1971) also sought to document trends when she searched for common aspects found in selected literature for adolescents published from the years 1966 to 1970. She attempted also to determine whether these common aspects really agreed with the theoretical assertations made by authorities about adolescent literature.[12]

TABLE 1: NUMBER AND TYPES OF CONTENT ANALYSIS RESEARCH DESIGNS USED IN DISSERTATION STUDIES OF YOUTH MEDIA.

Purpose	Questions	Research Problems	Number of Dissertation Studies N = 89
To Describe Characteristics of Communications	What?	To Describe Trends in Communication Content	6
		To Audit Communication Content Against Standards	14
		To Relate Known Characteristics of Sources to Messages They Produce	
	How?	To Analyze Techniques of Persuasion	1
		To Analyze Style (Word Uses, Alliterations, Rhetoric)	2
	For Whom?	To Relate Known Characteristics of the Audience to Messages Produced for Them	
		To Describe Patterns of Communications	
To Make Inferences as To the Antecedents of Communications (the Encoding Process	Why?	To Secure Political and Military Intelligence	
		To Analyze Psychological Traits of Individuals	
		To Infer Aspects of Culture and Cultural Change	36
		To Provide Legal Evidence	
	Who?	To Answer Questions of Disputed Authorship	

TABLE 1. (Cont.) NUMBER AND TYPES OF CONTENT ANALYSIS RESEARCH DESIGNS

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Purpose	Questions	Research Problems	Number of Studies
To Make Inferences as to the Effects of Communication (the Decoding Process)	What Effects?	To Measure Readability [and Language Use Characteristics]	15
		To Analyze Flow of Information	
		To Analyze Responses to Communication	15

Adapted from Ole R. Holsti: Content Analysis. In: Lindzey, Gardner and Aronson, Elliot, eds.: The Handbook of Social Psychology. 2d ed. Reading, Massachusetts, Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1968, v.2.

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Of the 23 studies concerned with describing content characteristics, 14 dealt with comparing actual contents with independent standards. For example, using the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders as her comparison standard, Booth (1971) investigated selected sociological elements in adolescent novels which were published since 1950 and which treated black inner-city ghetto adolescents.[13] Small (1970), on the other hand, applied literary standards to evaluate the literary qualities of widely read junior novels having major black characters.[14]

It appears that, in describing the characteristics of content, few studies have been conducted which have sought to relate known characteristics of message sources to the messages which they produce. For example, it might be asked whether authors with "x" characteristics are likely to produce content with "o" characteristics, while authors with "y" characteristics are likely to produce content with "m" characteristics.[15] This question of source characteristics could produce much needed research in the sociology of youth media.

Question 2. How are the characteristics of content used in the communication process? This question essentially looks at two elements: (1) the process of using symbols to persuade or propagandize; and (2) the analysis of style of content, including word usage, alliterations, and rhetoric. Although few dissertations in youth media have looked directly at propaganda, Rood (nee Martin) (1934) nonetheless studied nationalistic symbols appearing in pre-World War II children's books of seventeen different European countries.[16] Concerning herself with the ability of books to influence through style and form, Berding (1965) inquired into how authors manipulated their material

so as to appeal to children's sense of what is humorous.[17] Berman (1966), with the aid of a computer, analyzed the children's verses of Soviet author Samuil Maršak. She especially noted Maršak's sound system, syllabic distribution, stressed vowels and his use of rhyming words.[18]

Question 3. For whom is the content intended? Here we are concerned primarily with relating "known characteristics of the audience to messages produced for them."[19] In general, those studies which have been conducted in this area have centered largely on analyzing messages designed to change attitudes, such as advertisements addressed at different markets through different communications channels. It appears that relatively little has been done in dissertation research regarding this problem in youth media. Nonetheless, it would seem most appropriate now to consider this question, especially in light of the well-established youth subculture and the growing communication channels which support and respond to this subculture.

Another aspect of the "for whom" question relates to the study and description of communication patterns affected by situations or system changes.[20] Again, dissertation studies relating to this problem are apparently non-existent. But scholars might study how events or changes within the youth subculture influence the communication patterns and messages produced by or for that culture.

Question 4. Why was the content originated? Addressed specifically to the causes or antecedents of message content, this question implies that inferences about the causes of content can be drawn from the content itself.[21] Holsti lists the following reasons for the traditional use of content analysis in relation to this question: To detect or secure political and

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military intelligence; to analyze psychological traits of individuals; and to provide legal evidence.[22] Needless to say, these topics are not particularly germane to problems in youth media. Nevertheless, one other relevant area of investigation concerning the antecedents of content suggested by Holsti is the drawing of inference about various aspects of culture and cultural changes through analyses of message contents.[23]

In this survey, 36 dissertations were concerned with problems of culture and cultural change. Many of these studies dealt with the changing images of minority groups appearing in youth literature, as well as the changing of broadly based value systems. Although most of these studies were addressed primarily to the overt content of the messages, they were based on the general assumption that cultural values influence message content. For example, Carmichael (1971) studied social values as reflected in children's contemporary, realistic fiction published at five-year intervals from 1949 through 1969,[24] and Harmon (1971) analyzed value changes in popular music lyrics for the last twenty-five years using Harold Lasswell's system of eight comprehensive value categories.[25] Also concerned with cultural aspects, a similar study by Masland (1971) investigated the process of cultural change by hypothesizing that a relationship existed between values held by youth and song lyrics. He analyzed the recorded lyrical output of the Beatles and Bob Dylan for the 1960's. After placing along a continuum theme categories which emerged from the content analysis, he related fluctuations in categories in the continuum to three cultural events: the civil rights movement of 1963-1965; the migration of youth to the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco from 1965-1967; and the Woodstock Festival of the summer of 1969.[26]

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Other studies which relate to the "why" question include Seltzer (1969) and Chant (1971). Seltzer compared the changing concepts and attitudes toward the old in children's literature, 1870-1960, and hypothesized that, with the increase in older persons within the United States population since 1860, there would be an increased variableness in descriptions and meanings of significant old and young characters and things or items appearing in children's literature and that the basic stereotypes about the old would be less positive over the decades since 1860.[27] Chant explored social-personal values appearing in mass-produced children's fiction books selling for one dollar or less in the United States.[28] From these studies it would seem that investigations into cultural aspects of messages are still fruitful areas for study.

Question 5: Who wrote or produced the message content? This query also refers to certain aspects of message antecedents. According to Holsti, studies of this nature revolve primarily around determining authorship by identifying indicative clues within the context of the message.[29] Once again, it appears that studies of this nature are relatively non-existent in the area of youth media for the obvious reason that little in the way of questioned authorship exists in the youth media field.

Question 6: What have been or will be the effects of message content upon message recipients? According to Holsti, this question basically implies that when the context of messages have certain attributes (A, B, C), the effects of these attributes on the recipients may be predicted to be X, Y, and Z; and content analysis can be used as an instrument to isolate and describe attributes within the message causing

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the predictable effects.[30] Determining the effects of content on behavior patterns is always difficult, and the idea of using content analysis in this respect departs from the classical uses of content analysis.

Holsti maintains that one of the most systematic content analysis procedures which measures effects of content upon recipients revolves largely around studying the various attributes of style and the ease of message comprehension.[31] Readability studies, which fall into this category, have traditionally been popular with researchers in youth media. For example, Chathan (1967) analyzed the reading placement of the John Newbery prize books from 1945 through 1965 by employing several standard readability studies,[32] while Sikes (1971) compared the readability of creative stories written by children with those in published material through use of Cloze procedure scores.[33] Researchers have also investigated the linguistic characteristics of youth materials. Although concerned primarily with testing an instrument rather than with gauging content, Bukovec (1971) investigated the utility of Clymer's forty-five phonic generalizations in achieving accurate pronunciation when these generalizations were applied to a vocabulary of 3,348 words drawn from trade books popular with first, second, and third grade children.[34] Similarly, the grapheme-phoneme patterns in the vocabulary of library books and textbooks customarily read by primary grade children were studied by Bird (1972).[35]

Another important aspect of the "with what effect" aspect of communication effect on recipients is the analysis of information flow. In dissertation research, relatively little attention has been devoted

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to studying information flow in media for youth through the use of content analysis.

Another neglected area is that of determining responses to communication through the use of content analysis. Holsti maintains that one aspect of communication effect on recipients is the extent to which the symbols of communication have been assimilated into message patterns of recipient audience.[36] One means of testing the effect of communications is to perform a content analysis on a sample of messages produced by an audience after its exposure to an initial message. The researcher attempts to discover through this procedure the presence of any of the message symbols contained in the original message.

Although numerous experimental studies exist whereby investigators have exposed groups of subjects to the content of messages and subsequently tested for some kind of behavior or attitude change, relatively few studies have been conducted which use content analysis as the testing device to detect content symbol transfer. Nevertheless, dissertation research does provide some examples. Angelotti (1972) analyzed the written responses of 68 eighth graders to the junior novel Tuned Out as compared to their response to the adult novel A Separate Peace by applying Alan C. Purves' system of classifying elements of written responses to literature by category, sub-category, and element.[37] Pollock (1972) studied the responses made by college and high school students to three short stories by content analyzing their free responses to these stories by also using the Purves system of classification.[38] Similarly, Curtis (1968) studied the effects of illustrations and text

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in cuing children's oral responses to picture books. The investigation analyzed the oral responses of five first-grade boys to three picture books according to minimal terminable units developed by Kellogg W. Hunt.[39]

Needed Research

This brief review of the use of content analysis methodology in dissertation research of youth media suggests several avenues for new or enlarged research:

1. Research in Media Trends. Continuous research efforts must be made to keep abreast of the direction and trends in various media of interest to children and youth, embracing not only youth literature, but also television and mass-media publications, including mass-produced books, magazines, and newspapers. An especially fertile area in trend analysis lies in investigating the content of the new youth press, including youth culture and rock magazines. Content trends within youth culture and relating to special interest areas, such as religion, politics, education and morality are also worthy of investigation. Research efforts might be addressed also to comparing the content trends in two or more media. For example, how do the trends in commercial television intended for youth differ from trends in various print media also meant for youth.

More cross-national comparison of content seems appropriate also. For example, what, if any, are the differences in content trends in trade books, television, and magazines published or produced in the United States and other countries.

2. Research to Relate Message Source Characteristics to Messages They Produce. Another fruitful area for study is in relating the known characteristics of message sources to the messages they produce. This would seem to necessitate establishing a body of knowledge about the characteristics of message originators such as authors, editors and producers of youth media. Such studies might include relating ideological or social background characteristics of two or more individual authors to books they write and analyzing and comparing the sociological and institutional value systems of two or more media-production sources to the media they produce. The studies would undoubtedly contribute to the growing body of literature concerned with the sociology of youth media.

3. Research to Determine Techniques of Persuasion and Propaganda. Another area open to research relates to analyzing how persuasive techniques are used by authors and producers of media for youth. For example, what are the symbols of persuasion and how are they used in children's trade books, periodicals or films? Are there any differences in persuasive techniques used in mass-produced media and the more selective media? Researchers also might direct some attention to determining propaganda symbols in all media forms and how these symbols are manipulated to influence attitudes and behavior.

4. Research to Relate Known Characteristics of Audience to Messages Produced for Them. Attention might be given to determining if and how youth media reflect the values and idioms of the groups designated to receive the messages. Do books for youth really address themselves

to known group characteristics? Do youth magazines really speak to the value systems of adolescents?

5. Research to Describe Patterns of Communication in Youth Media Relative to Situational and Systemic Changes. Little research has been devoted to this complex problem but researchers might ask how social and national crises influence the patterns of youth media communication. Do messages within youth-oriented media change patterns as a result of national or social crises? If so, can any generalizations be drawn based on historical precedent?

6. Research to Describe Aspects of Culture and Cultural Change. Although a rather popular area of investigation already, continuous research is needed to document culture and cultural changes as reflected in youth media. Because so much of the history of youth media, including children's literature, has been developed on evidence produced through the use of impressionistic or intuitive research methods, scholars might well re-examine the media produced in earlier periods through the use of content analysis. It may be that such re-examination may very well require some revisions in our perceptions of past cultures, at least as these cultures are reflected in the media produced during various time periods.

7. Research to Describe the Flow of Information. Little research has been conducted to ascertain the dramatics of the flow of information to youth through various information media, including trade books, television, newspapers and magazines. Researchers might trace through content analysis the changes in information as it passes along various

media sources to youth. What factors determine the characteristics of the final product? Augmented with the development of underground youth presses, rock and counter-culture publications and other media, this area seems ripe now for useful and interesting study.

8. Research to Describe Responses to Communication. More research is necessary to determine how communications affect recipients of messages. Additional studies are needed in which the contents of written or verbal messages of recipients are analyzed following exposure to an initial communication in order to isolate those symbols which have their genesis in the original message and theoretically might have affected the recipients' behavior or thought processes. The question might also be asked as to whether content analysis has potential for helping to overcome some of the methodological problems involved in measuring attitude and behavior change attributable to media influence.

9. Research to Relate Standards to Content. Although this area has always been a popular area of inquiry, more research is needed in which non-content or external indices are used to judge and evaluate content. For example, how valid are media contents when compared to hard quantitative data of government, sociology, education, business and census data? Also, how valid are media contents when compared to expert opinion? For example, how does the depiction of family life in youth media compare with standards for positive family living formulated by experts in the field of family counseling or sociology? A multiplicity of such standards undoubtedly exist and offer interesting avenues for study.

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Conclusion

In concluding this article, it should be noted that, of the 89 content analysis abstracts studied, certain trends became evident. Obviously, four of the more popular areas of investigation included: (1) media trend studies; (2) studies which evaluated content against standards; (3) investigations which sought to detect aspects of culture and cultural changes; and (4) studies which measured either the readability of written messages or language-use characteristics.

Neglected areas of inquiry included the following: (1) relating known characteristics of message sources to the types of messages they produce; (2) relating known characteristics of audience to messages produced for them; (3) describing patterns of communication in relation to situational of systemic changes; (4) analyzing information flow in youth media; and (5) ascertaining audience responses to communications. Additional studies in all of these areas would certainly increase our overall understanding of the sociology of children and youth media.

Certain other trends are evident also from this survey. Although many of these studies related to describing content trends within children's trade books, it should be noted, too, that some investigators have turned attention to a broader range of problems, including cross-media comparisons of television and trade books as well as other media. We are also witnessing disciplines outside of education and librarianship showing interest in youth media as areas for serious investigation. Sociology and linguistics are especially noteworthy in this respect. These two areas have contributed some especially interesting and innovative

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hypotheses for testing and could help introduce more innovative approaches to hypothesis formulation in youth media research.

Although more studies are appearing which offer increased diversity of material, such as recorded music and television, investigators still rely primarily on trade books as their material sources, often neglecting such categories as mass-produced materials and youth-oriented periodicals and radio.

Finally, we are seeing the appearance of more content analysis studies using the computer as a tool of investigation. Hopefully, this trend will continue, and once computer programs of this nature are developed, they can be shared among researchers interested in using the computer in their own investigations.

In summary, then, it seems evident that content analysis offers much to those interested in learning more about the characteristics of media intended for children and youth. By learning to view and to analyze media content systematically and objectively in relation to socio-psychological phenomena appearing in society, researchers have much to offer in the field of youth media and communications.

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